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Testimony of Caroline Wheaton, Hartford Connecticut

IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 6356 AN ACT CONCERNING BENEFIT  
CORPORATIONS AND ENCOURAGING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Before the Joint Committee on Commerce

February 28, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Caroline Wheaton from Hartford, and I would like to speak in support of H.B. 6356, An Act Concerning Benefit Corporations and Encouraging Social Enterprises.

I am the Executive Director of Billings Forge Community Works in the Frog Hollow neighborhood of the Capitol city. Amongst other programs, our nonprofit runs a social enterprise café and catering company, The Kitchen, which provides job training opportunities for some of our most vulnerable citizens; those who were recently incarcerated or are homeless.

Since 2010, 24 people have started our small culinary job training program and 90% successfully completed the program. Within three months of completing the program, 65% went directly to jobs with starting wages averaging 124% of minimum wage, and another 18% decided to pursue additional education. We believe that an important opportunity is created by embedding our training in a working enterprise – one that gives trainees exposure to and real experience in all aspects of

a culinary career. It also enables staff to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with trainees as they work side by side to grow our business.

Being a "double bottom line" social enterprise has also been a great selling point to our customers as they make their dining choices based on the mission of The Kitchen, as well as the quality of its food. We see social enterprise as a growing movement both nationally and internationally. Younger generations in particular understand clearly that they can have an enormous social impact based upon the choices that they make as consumers. They are choosing to invest in our business precisely because it is a social enterprise.

As a long time culinary entrepreneur and small business owner with more than 25 years of experience; I have been greatly impressed by this unique market force. As legislators charged with the economic well being of our state, I urge you to consider this act not only for the impact it would make on our state's most complex community-based challenges, but for the revenue it will bring into our economy.

Connecticut has lost more young workers than any other since 1990. Pioneering legislation such as H.B. 6356 is one strategy which can be utilized to build a robust and innovative climate attractive to a younger and forward – thinking demographic. This legislation will grow jobs across the population as it also addresses community problems without relying on public funds.

Please help our state by passing H.B. 6356 and encourage social entrepreneurs to help make Connecticut a place where business supports thriving communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Caroline Wheaton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Caroline Wheaton

Executive Director